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Public Mood is Brightest on Record

PRINCETON, N.J. – The early months of 1986 are being called the "era of good feeling," with a record number of Americans expressing satisfaction with the way things are going in the nation and in their personal lives.

The latest survey shows two-thirds (66%) of all persons interviewed saying they are satisfied with what's happening in the U.S., the highest percentage recorded in the seven years this measurement has been taken, up a full 15 points since last November. The low point in this trend occurred in August 1979, when only 12% were satisfied with the way things were going in the nation, while 84% were dissatisfied.

At the same time, a record proportion (84%) currently are satisfied with the trend in their personal lives. This figure also is the highest in seven years, statistically matching last November's 82%.

The increasingly upbeat mood found in all regions of the nation and among all major population groups doubtless reflects the public's bullish financial outlook. As reported recently, 61% expect to be financially better off a year from now, an 8-point jump in optimism since January.

A companion question also showed a considerable improvement in consumers' perceptions of their present financial status compared to a year ago, with 46% saying they now are better off; in January the figure was 40%.

Finally, about four in 10 (37%) may be classified as "super optimists," matching the high point for this index recorded a year ago. These are people who say they now are better off than in the past and expect to be still more prosperous in the future.

Disparity in Views of Whites, Blacks

Although optimism in both national and personal dimensions has grown sharply since November among both whites and blacks, a wide disparity remains. In the latest survey 68% of whites, but only 44% of blacks, say they are satisfied with the way things are going in the nation; 86% of whites compared to 64% of blacks express satisfaction with their personal lives.

Here are the questions asked and the trends:

In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in the U.S. at this time?

Outlook Toward Nation

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	No opinion
	%	%	%
1986–Mar. 7–10	66	30	4
1985–Nov.	51	46	3
1984–Dec.	52	40	8
–Sept.	48	45	7
–Feb.	50	46	4
1983–Aug.	35	59	6
1982–Nov.	24	72	4
–Apr.	25	71	4
1981–Dec.	27	67	6
–June	33	61	6
–Jan.	17	78	5
1979–Nov.	19	77	4
–Aug.	12	84	4
–Feb.	26	69	5

In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in your own personal life?

Outlook Toward Personal Life

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	No opinion
	%	%	%
1986–Mar. 7–10	84	15	1
1985–Nov.	82	17	1
1984–Dec.	79	17	4
–Feb.	79	19	2
1983–Aug.	77	20	3
1982–Nov.	75	23	2
–Apr.	76	22	2
1981–Dec.	81	17	2
–June	81	16	3
–Jan.	81	17	2
1979–Nov.	79	19	2
–July	73	23	4
–Feb.	77	21	2

The latest results are based on telephone interviews with 1,004 adults, 18 and over, conducted in scientifically selected localities across the nation during the period March 7–10.

Only 33% of Jews Say Religion Is 'Very Important' in Lives

Only one-third (33%) of adults who give their religious preference as Jewish report that religion is "very important" in their lives, a far smaller proportion than is the case with Protestants (62% say religion plays a very important role for them) and Catholics (54%).

The current figure for Jews represents little decline in recent years, but must be considered an important factor related to the decline since the pre-1970 period in the percentage of adults who give their religious preference as Jewish. In 1947, for example, 5% did so, while in recent years the figure has been 2%.

Among major Protestant denominations, the largest proportions saying religion is very important in their lives are Southern Baptists and Mormons.

The figure for all Protestants has changed little in recent years, but is down 14 points from the 76% recorded in 1952. The percentage of Catholics who say "very important" has also changed little during the 1980s but has dropped more precipitously since 1952 – down 19 points.

A total of 7,649 adults were asked this question in 1985. The following tables show the trends for the nation, Protestants and Catholics. The long-term trend for Jews is not shown due to small sample sizes in certain years.

The question:

How important would you say religion is in your own life – very important, fairly important, or not very important?

The results:

Importance of Religion

	Very important	Fairly important	Not very important
	%	%	%
1985	55	31	13
1984	56	30	13
1983	56	30	13
1982	56	30	13
1981	56	29	14
1980	55	31	13
1978	52	32	14
1965	70	22	7
1952	75	20	5

(The proportions having no opinion, 1% in the latest survey, are excluded.)

Here are the latest results by Protestants and Catholics, based on interviews from six in-person surveys conducted during 1985:

Responses of Protestants

	Very important	Fairly important	Not very important
	%	%	%
1985	62	29	8
1984	62	29	8
1983	62	29	9
1980	61	30	8
1978	60	31	8
1965	74	20	5
1952	76	20	4

Responses of Catholics

	Very important	Fairly important	Not very important
	%	%	%
1985	54	35	10
1984	53	35	11
1983	56	34	9
1980	56	34	9
1978	51	36	11
1965	76	20	3
1952	83	14	3

Announcing new series of articles

HEALING THE RIFT BETWEEN LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES

Many religious observers today believe the lack of understanding and communication between liberal and conservative churches, both at the national and local levels, to be one of the most worrisome developments in contemporary Christianity.

A new Gallup survey, conducted for the Robert H. Schuller Ministries, explores extensively the differences and similarities between the religious "left" and "right" – in beliefs, attitudes, and practices – and examines steps that could be taken to heal the rift between these two wings of Christianity.

The first of a series of articles, based on this landmark survey, will appear in the May issue of *Emerging Trends*.

59% Say Major Faith Change Came When Lives Were Stable

Of the seven in 10 Americans who say that their faith (in terms of their own definition of faith) has changed significantly at some point in their life, 59% report the change occurred during a time when their lives were essentially stable or normal. Four in 10 (40%) say the change occurred when their lives were turbulent or chaotic.

This is one of the many important findings to emerge from a new study on the stages of growth in people's spiritual lives, reported in detail in *Faith Development and Your Ministry*.

Older adults, 40 or older, are more likely than young adults to report that their faith change came when their lives were stable.

Those who reported fairly recent changes in faith are more likely than others to perceive the changes as occurring during turbulent times. Finally, as one might expect, those who said the change led to a totally different faith are more likely than those who see little change to report the change occurred during a turbulent or chaotic time.

Faith Change – Result of Thought or Emotional Experience?

The study, undertaken for *The Religious Education Association of the United States and Canada*, also shows that among the seven in 10 who say their faith has changed significantly, about equal proportions say it came about as a result of a lot of thought and discussion (46%) and as a result of a strong emotional experience (49%).

The sharpest differences in responses on this question are found between whites and non-whites, with the latter, by a 62% to 32% margin, saying their faith change came as a result of a strong emotional experience.

College Graduates Twice as Likely To Cite "Thought, Discussion"

College graduates are twice as likely to say "a lot of thought and discussion" (61%) as they are to cite a "strong emotional experience" (34%).

Little difference is found between the views of men and women, with both sexes about equally divided between the two alternatives.

(See page 6 for details on how to order this publication.)

INCREASED CHURCHGOING ON EASTER MOST PRONOUNCED AMONG YOUTH, CATHOLICS

On Easter Sunday, March 30, 49% of the nation's adults, 18 and older, attended church services, a 7 percentage-point increase over the typical weekly attendance of 42%.

Among young adults (18-29 years), however, the increase was 13 points, from 32% in a typical week to 45% on Easter, a considerably larger increase than for persons 30 to 49 (up 6 points) or those 50 and older (up 5 points).

Catholics also made a special effort to attend Easter services, with their usual weekly attendance figure of 53% swelling to 67%, a 14-point increase. Among Protestants, however, attendance grew only 5 points, from 42% during the average week to 47% on Easter.

The increase in attendance on Easter was similar for men (up 6 points) and women (8 points).

This question was asked:

Did you happen to attend church on Easter Sunday this year, or not?

The following table compares the percentage of persons attending church on Easter with attendance in a typical week of 1985:

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

	Easter '86	Typical Week '85
NATIONAL	49%	42%
18–29 years	45	32
30–49 years	48	42
50 & older	53	48
Catholics	67	53
Protestants	47	42
Men	42	36
Women	55	47

The attendance figures for Easter, 1986 are based on in-person interviews with 1,552 adults, 18 and older, conducted April 11-14 in more than 300 scientifically selected locations across the nation. The attendance figures for a typical week in 1985 are based on interviews with 5,093 adults in four national surveys.

More Teens Now Approve Of Interracial Marriage

Teen-agers are showing greater tolerance of interracial marriages than before, according to the latest Gallup Youth Survey.

Six teens in 10 (61%) say they approve of marriages between whites and blacks. By comparison, in 1977, only 52% of America's teens approved of such marriages.

Three teens in four approve of interfaith marriages between Catholics and Protestants (78%) and between Jews and non-Jews (78%). Although the level of acceptance of interfaith marriages by teens has risen since 1977, the difference is not statistically significant.

Gains Found in All Groups

Acceptance of interracial marriages could be considered the bedrock test of the growth of racial tolerance in the United States. In this respect, almost all demographic and geographic segments of the teen population show significant gains in approval of interracial marriages.

Greatest gains in acceptance of interracial marriages since 1977 are noted among young men (up 12 percentage points), Catholic youth (up to 13 points), and teens from blue-collar family backgrounds (up 21 points).

Teens in the West (up 19 percentage points) lead other regions of the country in approving of marriages between blacks and whites.

Among black teens, eight in 10 (79%) say they approve of interracial marriages, up slightly from 76% who in 1977, said they approved.

Least Support Seen in South

Interracial marriages, however, fail to gain majority approval from teens living in the South. Currently, only 45% of all Southern teens say they approve of marriages between whites and blacks. This is unchanged from the findings of 1977, when 46% expressed approval.

Similarly, although seven in 10 Southern teens (70%) say they approve of interfaith marriages, the proportion approving is lower than that found in other regions of the country.

Catholic teens (81%) are somewhat more likely than their Protestant counterparts (75%) to approve of marriages between Catholics and Protestants. Eight in 10 white teens (80%) approve of such marriages, but only 63% of black teens say they approve of marriages between Catholics and Protestants. White teens (82%) are also slightly more likely than blacks (76%) to approve of marriages between Jews and non-Jews.

Among older teens, who are 16 to 18 years of age and who could be said to be at or approaching marriageable age, six in 10 (61%) approve of interracial marriages and eight in 10 (80%) say they approve of interfaith marriages.

Approval of interfaith marriages by eight in 10 teens is also found among those who come from white-collar family backgrounds and who live in the East or West.

Here is how the questions were asked:

Do you approve or disapprove of marriages between whites and blacks? Catholics and Protestants? Jews and non-Jews?

The results:

Approve of Marriages Between:

	Whites and blacks	Catholics and Protestants	Jews and non-Jews
NATIONAL	61%	78%	78%
Male	61	79	79
Female	61	76	77
Ages 13 to 15	62	76	77
Ages 16 to 18	61	80	80
Whites	57	80	82
Blacks	79	63	76
Protestants	55	75	77
Catholics	66	81	79
White-collar background	61	83	82
Blue-collar background	62	76	76
East	64	86	84
Midwest	64	77	77
South	45	70	70
West	80	81	84

The findings are based on telephone interviews with a representative national cross section of 502 teen-agers, 13 through 18, conducted from August through October 1985.

VOLUNTEERISM IN U.S. CONTINUES TO GROW

The level of volunteerism in American society continues to grow, with 36% of adults now engaged in charitable activities such as helping the poor, sick or elderly.

Despite federal cutbacks in funding for social programs, the high mobility of Americans and the increasing presence of women in the labor force, the current level of volunteerism represents a 9 percentage-point increase since 1977, when the first measurement was taken.

A sharp increase since 1977 (11 points) has occurred among young adults, 18–29 years. However, this group continues to lag older people in charitable activities.

Here is the question asked and the trend:

Do you, yourself, happen to be involved in any charity or social service activites, such as helping the poor, the sick or the elderly?

INVOLVEMENT IN CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

1986	36%
1984	31
1982	29
1977	27

Following is a comparison of the 1986 and 1977 findings by groups:

INVOLVEMENT IN CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	1986 %	1977 %	Point Change
NATIONAL	36	27	+ 9 points
18–29 years	27	16	+ 11
30–49 years	37	28	+ 9
50 & older	41	34	+ 7
Men	34	24	+ 10
Women	38	29	+ 9
East	33	25	+ 8
Midwest	34	23	+ 11
South	40	29	+ 11
West	36	31	+ 5
Protestants	36	27	+ 9
Catholics	31	26	+ 5

The latest findings are based on telephone interviews with 1,004 adults, 18 and older, conducted in scientifically selected locations across the nation during the period March 7–10.

WOMEN, OLDER ADULTS, CATHOLICS ARE BEST CHURCHGOERS

The latest Gallup audit of churchgoing shows women, older adults, Catholics, Southerners, blacks and persons with a college background to be the best churchgoers.

These findings are based on surveys conducted in four selected weeks during 1985 in more than 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation. A total of 5,093 adults, 18 and older, were interviewed in person.

Nationally, four adults in every 10 (42%) attended church or synagogue in a typical week in 1985.

Churchgoing has remained remarkably constant since 1972, after having declined from the high point of 49% recorded in 1955 and 1958.

This is the question asked in each survey:

Did you, yourself, happen to attend church or synagogue in the last seven days?

Here are the results by key groups:

CHURCH/SYNAGOGUE ATTENDANCE

NATIONAL	42%
Men	36
Women	47
18–29 years	32
18–24 years	31
25–29 years	33
30–49 years	42
50–64 years	47
65 & older	49
Protestants	42
Catholics	53
Jews	31
East	41
Midwest	44
South	46
West	33
Whites	41
Blacks	45
College graduates	45
College, incomplete	44
High school graduates	39
Less than H.S. grad.	39

FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND YOUR MINISTRY

Building a truly effective ministry requires an awareness of the stages of growth in a person's spiritual life, from childhood to old age, as well as an awareness of the impact of "life crises" on faith development.

Not only an awareness but a *response*, because failure to minister to people at their current stage of faith development – and to respond appropriately to their spiritual "highs" and "lows" – could result in a serious dropout rate in your church or synagogue.

For centuries it has been assumed that faith is something given, constant, unchanging. Now, however, it is clear that people go through "passages" in their spiritual lives, just as they do in other dimensions of their existence. Yet many religious professionals – clergy, counselors, youth leaders, and educators – sometimes appear to be insensitive, in their teaching and program planning, to people's spiritual journeys.

This new publication, FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND YOUR MINISTRY, based on a landmark study four years in the making, will guide you in your efforts to respond to the spiritual changes people experience as they move through life. The study was conducted by The Gallup Organization, Inc. for Faith Development in the Adult Age Cycle, a research project of the Religious Education Association of the United States and Canada in cooperation with the Center for Religious Education, College of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn.

FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND YOUR MINISTRY not only sheds light on these and other vital questions, but also explores the practical implications of the survey findings for your ministry.

If you preach, write, or teach, we sincerely believe you will find FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND YOUR MINISTRY to be of great help in your work.

HOW TO ORDER

This new publication may be ordered from The Princeton Religion Research Center, Inc. (P.O. Box 310, Princeton, N.J. 08542). The cost is $25 postpaid.

EMERGING TRENDS is published monthly except July and August by the PRINCETON RELIGION RESEARCH CENTER. The Center, founded in 1977, is an inter-faith non-denominational research organization with headquarters in Princeton, New Jersey. The PRRC specializes in creative, actionable research, utilizing the worldwide attitudinal and behavioral facilities of Gallup International. The purpose of the PRRC is to gain a better understanding of the nature and depth of religious commitment in the U.S. and abroad and to explore ways this information can enable religious leaders to promote spiritual growth. A one year subscription can be obtained for $30.00; inquire: **Publications Department, P.O. Box 310, 53 Bank Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08542 (Telephone 609/924-9600). PLEASE NOTIFY US OF ADDRESS CHANGE.**

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